



June 28, 2024

Dan Reinhard, Project Manager

VDOT Route 1 Multimodal Improvements Study

Sent via e-mail: dan.reinhard@vdot.virginia.gov

Dear Mr. Reinhard:

We, the Presidents of the three civic associations in 22202 (Arlington Ridge, Aurora Highlands, and Crystal City), which constitute the Livability22202 coalition, write to you today to express our continuing concerns about the VDOT Route 1 Multimodal Improvements project as described in the VDOT Phase 2 Draft Report.

At this point, we do not support continuing this project beyond the feasibility study because the proposed plan will not meet the safety and transportation needs of our community. We have previously expressed our concerns about the project, see our [December 12, 2022 Letter](#), and such concerns have not been resolved. While the Barnes Dance at 18th street is an improvement, we continue to view the project as negatively impacting our community— both as a matter of safety and as a matter of sound transportation management.

The study's failure to justify how the expected backups on Route 1 will be mitigated; the lack of safe pedestrian crossing options; the lack of east and west connectivity considerations across Route 1; and reliance on an unrealistic travel demand management plan, assuming an unjustified lower demand, are all reasons why we do not support the project. While the lower speed limit will assist in protecting pedestrians, without a realistic traffic demand management plan and appropriate pedestrian crossings, it seems like the worst will occur for both pedestrians and vehicles.

Because of these concerns, we unequivocally oppose the project. We have included a more detailed Memorandum attached to this letter from the Livability 22202 Route 1 Working Group to help you understand some of the broader concerns of the community and their recommendations.

We remain willing to engage and hope the conversations continue.

Sincerely,

Kateri Garcia, President
Arlington Ridge Civic Association

Rachel Hicks, President
Aurora Highlands Civic Association

Eric Cassel, President
Crystal City Civic Association

cc: Arlington County Board
Mark Schwartz, County Manager
Adam P. Ebbin, Senator
Adele Y. McClure, Delegate
Glenn Youngkin, Governor

Addendum to June 28, 2024 Livability22202 Route 1 Letter:
Livability22202 Route 1 Working Group Memorandum to Livability22202

We write to provide our analysis about the VDOT Route 1 Multimodal Improvements project as described in the VDOT Phase 2 Draft Report. We have many concerns and do not think the project should proceed, but if it must, we strongly recommend the following:

- Change the outermost southbound lane at 15th from a shared right turn lane/through lane to a dedicated right turn lane and allow right turns on red on Southbound US 1 at 15th Street, except during a north-south bike-ped signal.
- Add a left turn signal for eastbound drivers on 23rd turning northbound onto Route 1. This new signal provides a dedicated time for drivers to safely turn left, increases the safety of bicyclists and pedestrians crossing Route 1 on the north side, reduces the queueing on 23rd Street, and decreases the high volume of drivers turning north at 15th Street, as currently proposed the only safe and convenient location for drivers to turn north onto Route 1 from west of Route 1.
- Ensure that VDOT prepares the shovel-ready space for and provides funding for construction of a new 10th Street connection under the new I-395 ramps. If the proposed I-395 Interchange Modifications plan is funded, we could support the changes to the I-395 interchange and would look forward to working with you collaboratively to create the best possible designs to enhance safety and motility in our community.
- Decrease the total signal cycle length at 18th and Route 1 to a reasonable waiting time for drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists to increase safe crossings at the Barnes Dance intersection. We continue to recommend enhancing safety by adding a Dutch underpass to the Barnes Dance.
- We are concerned that signal times may be too long and set signalization along Route 1 to prioritize east-west safety and connectivity over Route 1 traffic throughput. If we keep total signal cycles as short as possible, per NACTO guidance, and only modify as needed during “rush” hours, we decrease crossing risks.
- We also recommend two lanes be 10 foot wide vs the 11 foot in the report. The thinner lanes would slow traffic and provide more space for non-auto uses.

Safety First: The first, and most important, goal of the VDOT project is: Improve multimodal safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, micro-mobility modes, transit, and vehicles along and across Route 1.” This goal is not being met by current project designs nor does it comply with the original MOU between Amazon and Virginia: “...to expeditiously evaluate and implement opportunities to improve safety, accessibility, and the pedestrian experience crossing Rt. 1...” Although the VDOT report states: “Due to the change in geometry around 15th Street S and 18th Street S, crash predictions for this area should not be directly compared between No-Build and Build,” we believe that that the safety of those intersections will more closely resemble what is currently experienced at 23rd Street as opposed to the safe crossing we currently experience. Our analysis of the data from the VDOT report and County Vision Zero crash data suggests that the entire roadway will be more dangerous. To design a road that is more dangerous than the existing road is against basic County Vision Zero policy, which VDOT cites as providing guidance to the VDOT study.

At-Grade Route 1 at 18th Street: The VDOT report states: “While no design for an at-grade intersection would be absolutely conflict free, the pedestrian scramble provides a safer alternative than crossings at conventional intersections. “ VDOT further acknowledges the increased risk with an at-grade crossing, even with the scramble, in the draft report: “An at-grade Route 1 at 18th will not be as safe as using the current underpass.” The assumed, overly long 160 second total signal cycle length at this intersection increases the risk of crossings because drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians may grow impatient with the long wait times and run red lights, turn right on red, or bolt across the street. The proposed at-grade intersection will be more dangerous than the current, almost perfectly safe, grade-separated condition that our community heavily uses. The current design will not be safe or feel safe for crossing pedestrians and bicyclists, nor will it provide the convenient access to the Crystal City Metro Station that is needed for the ready access to the public mass transit system.

We also ask you to remove the following sentences from the final report because they are misleading and inaccurate: “neither an underpass nor overpass was particularly desirable” and “underpasses have been generally undesirable, as evidenced by the removal of the 23rd Street S pedestrian tunnel in 2019.” The community has consistently expressed preference for the Dutch underpass, a shallow “tunnel”, rather than the at-grade configuration, and both CCCA and AHCA sent strong letters protesting the closure of the 23rd Street tunnel.

Speed Studies: Lowering the speed on Route 1 to 25 mph maximum is an essential component for improving safety of an at grade Route 1. Congratulations on having the VDOT Route 1 project speed study approved and ready to implement after construction. However, we understand that the County and VDOT are now working together to evaluate the feasibility of lowering the speed limit in the “gap” - a critical area south of 23rd Street and north of the Alexandria border - because this “gap” is not included in the VDOT Route 1 speed study. This supplemental study of the “gap” needs to be assessed, performed, and evaluated as well. Without this comprehensive assessment of speed studies for the entire length of Route 1 in Arlington, it is unclear how the Route 1 project can move beyond Phase 2. Analyzed results and the data-based determination to lower the speed limit to 25-mph along the entire length of the project to the Alexandria line is the only holistic implementation that will avoid confused motorists and speeding spilling over to the other roadway segments.

Enforcement: Although VDOT has had preliminary engagement with both the Virginia State Police and the Arlington County Police Department, the details on how effective traffic enforcement can work have not been laid out. Without an effective enforcement plan, all of the proposed safety enhancements will not be sufficient to protect us.

Travel Demand Management (TDM) Plan: During Phase 2, VDOT gathered new traffic volume data and reversed their Phase 1 recommendation to reduce the total traffic volume on Route 1 by 20-30 % of the 2019 volume. According to the VDOT report, total traffic volume is still down and the AM peak commuting patterns have spread out so that the AM traffic no longer causes significant congestion. However, peak PM traffic has returned, causing significant congestion along Route 1 north of 23rd.

We encourage your preliminary TDM plans to focus on the 18,000 commuters identified by VDOT who used alternative modes pre-Covid but are now missing from 2022 non-SOV data (Figures 7-2 and 7-3, p. 79 draft Phase 2 report.). It is critical to know if these workers are still working from home, working part-time or retired, or if they changed jobs and commuting patterns. Find out why the 9,000 currently driving commuters are driving and what, if anything, would entice them to begin to use or return to using alternative commuting modes. This data might lead to significant TDM revisions.

VDOT plans to reduce the PM congestion by focusing on TDM at the intersection of 15th and Route 1, with limited details on a truly regional TDM program and no proposed study of the 9000 commuters who drive or the 18,000 who used to use alternative modes of transportation, is short-sighted and will lead to poor decision-making. Furthermore, the proposed reduction in right turn lanes from southbound Route 1 to westbound 15th Street, combining the right turn lane with a through traffic lane, and adding the No Right Turn on Red appears to complicate the VDOT TDM goals, which include the “2030 Build condition with the recommended concept and TDM program traffic model, queueing does not spill back to I-395.” In the proposed plan, southbound traffic on Route 1 turning left at 15th will probably back up beyond an acceptable queueing distance. We urge you to allow right on red for these drivers, if safe pedestrian crossing can be maintained. We also urge you to add a left turn signal for EB drivers turning NB at 23rd Street, which would alleviate some of the left turns at 15th.

We find that assuming that the current traffic patterns will continue into the future is unrealistic and the TDM focus exclusively on reducing traffic at 15th Street is both inexplicable and unacceptable. We remain concerned that Route 1 traffic congestion will continue to spill over onto our neighborhood streets. We continue to request a truly regional TDM program with an expanded, comprehensive, financially well-supported transit network that will reduce overall Route 1 traffic to no more than 25,000 vpd (vehicles per day).

I-395 Ramps and Interchanges: The proposed changes to the I-395 interchanges and ramps will probably be beneficial to our community. The changes provide a more logical traffic flow, increased safety for drivers exiting and entering I-395, and would give us more options to enter our neighborhood from I-395 without driving on Route 1. The 10th Street connection under a revamped ramp creates additional connectivity and options for drivers and bike-peds. This connection is extremely important for many of the local residents. The requirement that Arlington County complete the project is very troublesome. Without 10th Street, our support for this project drops even more dramatically. The deteriorating conditions of the ramps add urgency to starting this renovation. Specific design details need to be further developed, with additional public engagement such as how speed will be effectively reduced upon entering Route 1. We encourage VDOT to prioritize funding for and building of the new I-395 interchanges over the separate Route 1 Multimodal project.

We find that the proposed plans decrease the safety for bicyclists and pedestrians crossing Route 1, do not match the goal of the MOU between Virginia and Amazon, will create more traffic congestion on Route 1 and in our neighborhood, and overall decrease the livability of our neighborhood. The TDM plan is opaque, exclusively focused on limiting driving in our neighborhood, and needs to be expanded into a wider regional plan. Our community has never

supported bringing Route 1 to grade at 18th over grade separated choices. In summary, we do not support the continuation of the Route 1 Multimodal Improvements project beyond the feasibility phase.